

§ 3431.5

and its impact on meeting critical veterinarian shortage situations. All comments will be made available and accessible to the public.

§ 3431.5 Solicitation of veterinarian shortage situations.

(a) *General.* The Secretary will follow the procedures described in this part to solicit veterinarian shortage situations as the term is defined in § 3431.3.

(b) *Solicitation.* The Secretary will publish a solicitation for nomination of veterinarian shortage situations in the FEDERAL REGISTER, on the Agency's Web site, or other appropriate format or forum.

(c) *Frequency.* Contingent on the availability of funds, the Secretary will normally publish a solicitation on an annual basis. However, the Secretary reserves the right to solicit veterinarian shortage situations every two or three years, as appropriate.

(d) *Content.* The solicitation will describe the nomination process, the review criteria and process, and include the form used to submit a nomination. The solicitation may specify the maximum number of nominations that may be submitted by each State animal health official.

(e) *Nominations.* Nominations shall identify the veterinarian shortage situation and address the criteria in the nomination form which may include the objectives of the position, the activities of the position, and the risk posed if the position is not secured.

(f) *Nominating Official.* The State animal health official in each State is the person responsible for submitting and certifying veterinarian shortage situations within the State to NIFA officials. It is strongly recommended that the State animal health official of each State involve the leading health animal experts in the State in the nomination process.

§ 3431.6 Review of nominations.

(a) *Peer panel.* State shortage situations nominations will be evaluated by a peer panel of experts in animal health convened by the Secretary. The panel will evaluate nominations according to the criteria identified in the solicitation. The panel will consider the objectives and activities of the vet-

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erinarian position in the veterinary service shortage situation and the risks associated with not securing or retaining the position and make a recommendation regarding each nomination.

(b) *Agency review.* The Secretary will evaluate the recommendations of the peer panel and designate shortage situations for the VMLRP.

§ 3431.7 Notification and use of designated veterinarian shortage situations.

The Secretary will publish the designated veterinarian shortage situations on the Agency's Web site and will use the designated veterinarian shortage situations to solicit VMLRP loan repayment applications from individual veterinarians in accordance with subpart B of this part.

Subpart B—Administration of the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program

§ 3431.8 Purpose and scope.

(a) *Purpose.* The regulations of this subpart apply to the award of veterinary medicine loan repayments under the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) authorized by the National Veterinary Medicine Service Act, 7 U.S.C. 3151a.

(b) *Scope.* Under the VMLRP, the Secretary enters into service agreements with veterinarians to pay principal and interest on education loans of veterinarians who agree to work in veterinary shortage situations for a prescribed period of time. In addition, program participants may enter into an agreement to provide services to the Federal government in emergency situations in exchange for salary, travel, per diem expenses, and additional amounts of loan repayment assistance. The purpose of the program is to assure an adequate supply of trained food animal veterinarians in shortage situations and provide USDA with a pool of veterinary specialists to assist in the control and eradication of animal disease outbreaks.

§ 3431.9 Eligibility to apply.

(a) *General.* To be eligible to apply to the VMLRP an applicant must: